

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

PIERRE DOUGLAS GARDNER,

Plaintiff,

v.

WILLIAM E. DUFFIN,

Defendant.

Case No. 24-CV-1090-JPS

ORDER

Plaintiff Pierre Douglas Gardner, an inmate confined at Waupun Correctional Institution, filed a pro se complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that Defendant Magistrate Judge William E. Duffin (“Judge Duffin”) violated his civil rights. ECF No. 1. This Order resolves Plaintiff’s motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee and screens his complaint.

1. MOTION FOR LEAVE TO PROCEED WITHOUT PREPAYING THE FILING FEE

The Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”) applies to this case because Plaintiff was a prisoner when he filed his complaint. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(h). The PLRA allows the Court to give a prisoner plaintiff the ability to proceed with his case without prepaying the civil case filing fee. *Id.* § 1915(a)(2). When funds exist, the prisoner must pay an initial partial filing fee. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). He must then pay the balance of the \$350 filing fee over time, through deductions from his prisoner account. *Id.*

On August 28, 2024, the Court ordered Plaintiff to pay an initial partial filing fee of \$9.79. ECF No. 5. Plaintiff paid that fee on September 10, 2024. The Court will grant Plaintiff’s motion for leave to proceed without

prepaying the filing fee. ECF No. 2. He must pay the remainder of the filing fee over time in the manner explained at the end of this Order.

2. SCREENING THE COMPLAINT

2.1 Federal Screening Standard

Under the PLRA, the Court must screen complaints brought by prisoners seeking relief from a governmental entity or an officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The Court must dismiss a complaint if the prisoner raises claims that are legally “frivolous or malicious,” that fail to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or that seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

In determining whether the complaint states a claim, the Court applies the same standard that applies to dismissals under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). *See Cesal v. Moats*, 851 F.3d 714, 720 (7th Cir. 2017) (citing *Booker-El v. Superintendent, Ind. State Prison*, 668 F.3d 896, 899 (7th Cir. 2012)). A complaint must include “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). The complaint must contain enough facts, accepted as true, to “state a claim for relief that is plausible on its face.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows a court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556).

To state a claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that someone deprived him of a right secured by the Constitution or the laws of the United States and that whoever deprived him of this right was acting under the color of state law. *D.S. v. E. Porter Cnty. Sch. Corp.*, 799

F.3d 793, 798 (7th Cir. 2015) (citing *Buchanan-Moore v. County of Milwaukee*, 570 F.3d 824, 827 (7th Cir. 2009)). The Court construes pro se complaints liberally and holds them to a less stringent standard than pleadings drafted by lawyers. *Cesal*, 851 F.3d at 720 (citing *Perez v. Fenoglio*, 792 F.3d 768, 776 (7th Cir. 2015)).

2.2 Analysis

Plaintiff alleges that Judge Duffin violated his First Amendment rights on May 10, 2023 when he denied a grievance in the form of habeas corpus. ECF No. 1 at 2. The Court finds that Plaintiff may not proceed on any claims against Judge Duffin because he has judicial immunity. Judges are not liable in civil actions for their judicial acts unless they have acted in the clear absence of all jurisdiction. *John v. Barron*, 897 F.2d 1387, 1391 (7th Cir. 1990) Plaintiff challenges Judge Duffin's decision in a prior case. This action, however, was unquestionably made within the scope of judicial capacity; there are no facts alleged that suggest Judge Duffin acted in the clear absence of jurisdiction. As such, Judge Duffin is absolutely immune from suit. See *Dawson v. Newman*, 419 F.3d 656, 660–61 (7th Cir. 2005); *John*, 897 F.2d at 1391 (“A judge will not be deprived of immunity because the action he took was in error, was done maliciously, or was in excess of his authority.”).

Finally, although courts generally must permit civil plaintiffs at least one opportunity to amend their pleadings, the Court need not do so where the amendment would be futile. *Runnion ex rel. Runnion v. Girl Scouts of Greater Chi. & Nw. Ind.*, 786 F.3d 510, 520 (7th Cir. 2015). Because no amendment can overcome Plaintiff's judicial immunity issue, it would be futile to allow him to amend the complaint.

3. CONCLUSION

In sum, Plaintiff's complaint fails to state a claim. Because amendment would be futile, the Court will accordingly dismiss this case for the failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

Accordingly,

IT IS ORDERED that Plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee, ECF No. 2, be and the same is hereby **GRANTED**;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this case be and the same is hereby **DISMISSED** under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A(b)(1) because the complaint fails to state a claim;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Court document that this inmate has incurred a "strike" under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g);

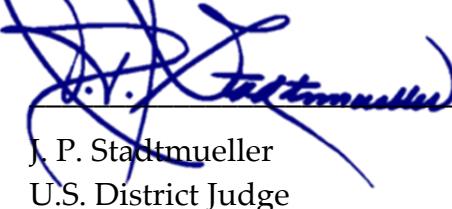
IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the agency having custody of Plaintiff shall collect from his institution trust account the \$340.21 balance of the filing fee by collecting monthly payments from Plaintiff's prison trust account in an amount equal to 20% of the preceding month's income credited to Plaintiff's trust account and forwarding payments to the Clerk of Court each time the amount in the account exceeds \$10 in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The payments shall be clearly identified by the case name and number assigned to this case. If Plaintiff is transferred to another county, state, or federal institution, the transferring institution shall forward a copy of this Order along with his remaining balance to the receiving institution; and

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that a copy of this Order be sent to the officer in charge of the agency where Plaintiff is confined;

The Clerk of Court is directed to enter judgment accordingly.

Dated at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this 17th day of September, 2024.

BY THE COURT:



J. P. Stadtmueller
U.S. District Judge

This Order and the judgment to follow are final. A dissatisfied party may appeal this Court's decision to the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit by filing in this Court a notice of appeal within **thirty (30)** days of the entry of judgment. *See Fed. R. of App. P. 3, 4.* This Court may extend this deadline if a party timely requests an extension and shows good cause or excusable neglect for not being able to meet the thirty-day deadline. *See Fed. R. App. P. 4(a)(5)(A).* If Plaintiff appeals, he will be liable for the \$605.00 appellate filing fee regardless of the appeal's outcome. If Plaintiff seeks leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* on appeal, he must file a motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* with this Court. *See Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(1).* Plaintiff may be assessed another "strike" by the Court of Appeals if his appeal is found to be non-meritorious. *See 28 U.S.C. §1915(g).* If Plaintiff accumulates three strikes, he will not be able to file an action in federal court (except as a petition for habeas corpus relief) without prepaying the filing fee unless he demonstrates that he is in imminent danger of serious physical injury. *Id.*

Under limited circumstances, a party may ask this Court to alter or amend its judgment under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 59(e) or ask for relief from judgment under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b). Any motion under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 59(e) must be filed within **twenty-eight (28)** days of the entry of judgment. The Court cannot extend this deadline. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(b)(2).* Any motion under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b) must be filed within a reasonable time, generally no more than one year after the entry of the judgment. The Court cannot extend this deadline. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(b)(2).*

A party is expected to closely review all applicable rules and determine, what, if any, further action is appropriate in a case.